

EVIL, SUFFERING, DEATH: WHY?

Lesson 2.

"I Just Want to know WHY"

INTRODUCTION:

WHO, when raising our own children or maybe caring for someone else's, has not been completely astounded and confounded when a small child just *KEEPS ON ASKING "WHY"*? That seems to be the kind of persistence many of us have as we wonder about suffering and death and the influences of evil. *"WHY" does God allow such, or "WHY" in this particular case, or "WHY NOT" in that one?* And, of course, just *asking* why is not nearly enough, is it? We'd really like for God to give us an *answer*, or a *sign*, or a *special "thought"* to enlighten our perception! Doesn't God realize that *I really need to know?* Think how much good I could do for His cause if I just had some answers!

It isn't that we don't already KNOW most of the answers we can understand, it's just that we constantly need reaffirmations. Also, we're so inbred with the idea of a "works-rewarded" religion that it's hard to get away from it. The idea that keeps rolling around somewhere in our heads is "DO GOOD, and you WON'T SUFFER"!

I. ADVERSITY NEARLY ALWAYS BRINGS UP THE "WHY?" QUESTION!

- A. Jesus' disciples were about "half" presumptuous (because they thought they knew part of the answer) when they asked the "WHY" question about the man's blindness in John 9:2: *"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"* -
1. Though it may not have been in the same words, most of us have asked such a question at one time or another, about some incident in our lives.
 - a) *Why* did this happen? *Why* did my son run away? *Why* did my father contract cancer? *Why* did our house burn? *Why* did I lose my job? Or, pointedly and selfishly, *Why ME*, Lord?
 - b) Then, of course, other questions about God Himself have followed, such as: Is God unfair? Can't God do anything about it? Does it matter to Him that we're suffering?
 2. Some have tried to answer the questions, most inadequately, though!
 - a) Elie Wiesel, a nobel-winning writer, had a strong faith in God, but lost it in the Holocaust. He finally concluded that, in light of all the pain and suffering, God just must not exist!
 - b) Rabbi Harold Kushner took the approach that God probably thinks that life is unfair, but that He just can't do anything about it!
 - c) A third group evades the problem of unfairness by looking to the future when an exacting justice will work itself out in the universe! The Hindu doctrine of Karma applies a mathematical precision to this belief, calculating that it may take a soul 6,800,000 incarnations to realize perfect justice. At the end of all those incarnations a person will have experienced exactly the amount of pain and pleasure that he or she deserves!
 - d) A fourth approach is to flatly deny the problem and insist the world is fair! Echoing Job's friends, these people insist the world does run according to fixed, regular laws, and that good people will prosper and evil ones will fail! This is what most of the

charismatic groups promise! [Like, "*Do good and support this work and you'll prosper!*"]

3. **Jesus DID give the answer, RIGHT ON THE SPOT, to His disciples!** "*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents, but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in Him!" - **John 9:3.***
- B. Just briefly now, with the hope of developing it further a little later, the "WHY" question also involves part of the "WHO" question, but often it's difficult to know WHICH ONE might be responsible in any specified case!
 1. **GOD** is part of the answer! cf. **Deut.30:15; Amos 3:6.**
 2. **EVIL**, or sin, always results in adversity [for our own sins as well as others]
 3. **SATAN**, who is the one we want to blame everything on! **1 Pet.5:8-9-** (NKJV) "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*"
 4. **ANGUISH** will also beget anguish.
 5. **NATURAL OCCURANCES** which are good for some are also a cause of suffering for others!
 - a) Rain, for instance, which is so necessary for a lot of pasture areas, is a definite disadvantage to the orchardist whose trees are in bloom, or the alfalfa farmer whose mowed hay is drying on the ground!
 - b) THIS IS ALWAYS TRUE: **God is sensitive to what we're feeling!**
 - c) ANOTHER TRUISM: **Whatever God accomplishes through our suffering is always for our best interest!**
- C. A real problem under this heading is that WE FEEL LIKE WE ARE RIGHTEOUS and we really don't want to suffer! We can understand somewhat about the suffering of sinners, but it's difficult to see "**WHY**" Abel suffered, even when he was pleasing to God, or "**WHY**", *in our righteousness*, we might also have to suffer!
 1. One of the things that suggests we perhaps need to change our perspective is that "ALL SUFFERING IS NOT NECESSARILY EVIL"
 - a) Suffering is remedial ... it produces results!
 - b) Suffering and trials build character ... they are tools for spiritual growth.
 - c) Handling suffering and trials also encourages others in many different ways.
 - d) Suffering helps us to seek heaven.
 - e) The ANSWER to evil and suffering is found in the Savior.
 - f) Some things are so important that they're worth the pain and suffering necessary to accomplish them.
 - g) Adversity is often ALLOWED in our lives for different reasons:
 - 1) Sometimes it's to "get our attention"!
 - 2) Often, it reminds us of God's great love!
 - 3) It will often cause us to examine ourselves!
 - 4) It will help us to conquer our pride! **2 Cor.12:7-**"...to keep me from exalting myself!"
 - 5) It magnifies our weaknesses and helps us focus on the strength and power of God!
 2. So once more we continue to stress, **it isn't WHAT HAPPENS TO US** that we need to give a lot of attention to, but **HOW WE REACT TO THOSE THINGS THAT HAPPEN!**
- D. cf. **Judges 6:13-**"Pray, sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?"

1. Regarding the "WHY" of suffering, Brian Hebblethwaite, in **Evil, Suffering, and Religion** suggests that different answers are offered in various religions where belief in a God is central.
 - a) In **Buddhism**, there is no interest in the WHY of suffering. Instead, the emphasis is on coping through a serene resignation and self-sacrifice.
 - b) In **Chinese Taoism**, believers are similarly urged to yield themselves passively to a mysterious universal harmony rather than resist through questioning.
 - c) In contrast, **Judaism, Islam, and Christianity** all have a doctrine of creation in which humans come into being and exist in a relationship to a God who exercises his creative will. In these religions, evil does not exist on its own, but is a disturbance or aberration of what is inherently good --- that is, the created world.
2. Hebblethwaite also mentions five answers to the "WHY?" question about suffering:
 - a) **Suffering is divine punishment.** Mankind is guilty and therefore deserving of punishment. There's no question that examples of divine reward and punishment are present in the O.T. writings.
 - b) **Suffering is a divine test, or trial of faith.** God permitted Satan to test his servant, Job, and others. **Heb.12:7.**
 - c) **Suffering is part of the gift of human freedom.** To love God properly we have to be created free to choose Him. Moral evil and its result, suffering, are necessary components of a world of persons.
 - d) **Suffering is part of the nature and function of the physical world.** The universe functions according to certain laws that govern its well-being. Natural causes like floods, droughts, and earthquakes hurt many innocent people.
 - e) **Suffering is creation in process.** Since creation is an on-going process leading to a future goal, there is suffering now. It's just the price we pay.

II. COUPLED WITH THE "WHY" QUESTION IS THE WONDERMENT ABOUT THE SEEMING ABSENCE OF GOD'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH US IN ANY WAY!

- A. If He'd just show us He's there, and aware of our circumstances, it would go far in keeping us faithful to Him!
 1. WHY DOES HE REMAIN SO SILENT?
 - a) With Joseph and Job both, God was notably silent; so it isn't just some way He's chosen to penalize us!
 - 1) Joseph interpreted a dream to his brothers and they threw him into a cistern, then sold him and reported him dead.
 - 2) In Egypt, he refused an opportunity of adultery and landed in prison.
 - 3) In prison, he interpreted another dream to save a cell-mate's life, and the cell mate promptly forgot about him.
 - 4) In fact, we seem to know more about God's involvement with BOTH of these men than they knew themselves at the time!
 - b) Also, as far as we know, God was silent for the 400 years between Genesis and Exodus. Many bible lessons are given on Joseph, and then on Moses and the deliverance, but I've never heard one on what happened during the intervening 400 years.
 - c) God's silence also extended to Calvary! [When Charlemagne, king of the Franks, first heard of Jesus' arrest and execution, he exploded in rage. Grabbing his sword and rattling it in the scabbard,

he shouted, "Oh, if only I had been there; I would have slain them all with my legions!" But he wasn't present, and couldn't have helped! But God, the Father, Who *could have helped*, did not lift a finger on behalf of His condemned Son!] **Actually, God was helping --- He was helping YOU and ME, sacrificing His Son so we could be saved from our SINS!**

- 1) Even Jesus' appearance after the resurrection was SILENT! Christ presented Himself to people who already believe in Him. So far as we know, not a single unbeliever saw Jesus after His death!
- 2) But **EVEN WITH SILENCE**, Jesus made a difference! cf. **Heb.4:15-16; 10:19-22.**
2. We must be careful not to impugn the love, or wisdom, or effectiveness of the God Who **STILL LOVES US**, as He did when He allowed His Son to die in our behalf!
- B. We don't always receive what we're looking for ... and often what we FEEL is the "perfect solution" to our anxieties and apprehensions **ISN'T ALWAYS THAT!**
 1. **ONE OF THE SURPRISES** of the Bible is that those instances when God DID communicate with man, it didn't usually foster long-term belief! In fact, most of them stand out as examples of faith/essness!
 2. The very motive for human existence is to continue to develop US to be more like GOD, and not the other way around! We're to take on the Divine nature; we're to be holy, as He is holy; we're to let Him live in us, and His mind be in us!
- C. But consider for a moment our "perfect solution" of God communicating with us, and see just how effective it is!
 1. God DID answer men, and showed Himself on Mt. Sinai, and through the Wilderness, and upon Mt. Carmel.
 - a) But it surely didn't help those in the Exodus, did it? In fact, after just a small sample, they pled with God not to speak to them anymore, so Moses then was the mediator.
 - b) Ahab was at Mt. Carmel, and even after that was still one of the most wicked men to ever live --- with disastrous results for him!
 2. God told Israel: *"From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention."*-**Jer.7:25-26.** And Israel told God: *"Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions ... and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"*- **Isa.30:10.**
 3. When the prophets complained loudly about God's absence, He agreed with them, then explained why. **And He pointed out to them that what He was doing was a sign of mercy, not of weakness!**
 - a) To Jeremiah, He expressed His disgust with what He saw in Israel-- dishonest gain, shedding of innocent blood, oppression & extortion.
 - b) To Ezekiel, God explained that once Israel's rebellions had passed a certain point, He simply *"gave them over"* to their sins.
 - c) To Zechariah, He said, *"When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen"*.
 4. ALL OF THE PROPHETS pointed out the same thing: **GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL!**

III. EVEN IN THIS, THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS AT WORK!

- A. God's main purpose for man, His greatest desire from us, is for us to CHOOSE GOD because we LOVE HIM, notwithstanding what's going on around us!
 1. If God had told Job, "I'm using you to prove that my people really love Me and won't forsake me", it wouldn't really have been a test, would it?
 2. Job would have persevered because he needed to help God defeat Satan.

3. But THAT wasn't the contest! What was under question was whether, upon the demonstration of God's love, man would be prone to show his love to God, even in the face of adversity
- B. Is the PROVIDENCE OF GOD involved in such a theme as this? cf Acts 17:25, 27-28.
1. What activates it? [What kicks it into gear?] Is it **our need? our love? prayer? any other suggestions?**
 2. What about when it DOESN'T kick into gear? (That's simply from OUR perspective, because God's doing the BEST for us, whether we realize it or not!
 3. Providence is NOT the blind process of natural forces! When applied to God, the word means His foresight and forethought in creating the univers wheeby He would be in control and could carry out His purpose to its ultimate consummation.
 - a) Possessing these qualities of absolute and infinite Being, God cannot make a mistake; what He does is right, and it cannot be otherwise!
 - b) An interesting question illustrates this point: **"Is murder wrong because God said it was, or did God say it was because it's wrong?"**
- C. There IS a DIVINE PROVIDENCE, part of which CAN be understood because it is revealed! [These thoughts are from Forrest Moyer in his 1992 class at Clear Lake.]
1. God does not operate providentially in any way that is in conflict with His nature or His revealed will. He is holy and righteous and all His acts will be consistent with these characteristics.
 2. Providence does not over-ride man's free will.
 3. Providence must be distinguished from the miraculous.
 4. God works behind the scenes in providence.
 5. There is a special providence for the people of God. Phil.4:19-(NKJV) *"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*
 - a) "ALL YOUR NEEDS": for salvation? physical needs? eternal needs? spiritual blessings in this life?
 - b) **"WHATEVER IT WAS IT WAS RECIPROCAL FOR THE PHYSICAL CONTRIBUTIONS THEY'D SENT!"**

CONCLUSION:

The understanding about the providence of God is darkened by a limited knowledge as well as an earthly mentality. Frustratingly, we often don't know WHY it seems to ***"work"*** this time and ***not that time!*** **PERHAPS, LIKE JOB, WE JUST COULDN'T COMPREHEND THE ANSWER GOD WOULD GIVE US, ANYWAY!**